

TESTIMONY FOR THE COMMITTEE ON JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Victoria R. Renard

US English

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in favor of A.B. 806, legislation to make English the official language of Wisconsin and provide government fiscal accountability of the policy.

My name is Victoria Renard and I work for US English, a non-profit organization that promotes language policies. Founded in 1983 by former Senator S.I. Hayakawa, we have more than 20,000 members in Wisconsin.

Up until 7 months ago, I was a resident of Wisconsin. In fact, I lived in the 89th district virtually my entire life. My mother and brother still live in the house where I grew up. Just ½ mile from the Bay and with all this snow, I'm sure Mom will call to tell me about the roads flooding to impassable like they did when she first moved there 35 years ago.

I tell you this because I know Wisconsin. I have lived and worked here. I know what the state has to offer and the great potential it possesses. It is why my heart is still here.

Our state has long been a destination for those looking for a better life, in fact, my grandfather was the first American born in my maternal family. His mother would stand on the corner after church and speak in Polish with her friends, so the "chacoveynoss" (*phonetic spelling*) children wouldn't understand the gossip. Those were the "noisy" children.

The organization that I work for believes my great-grandmother had the right to speak Polish with her family and friends. But, we also believe that she needed to learn English to be able to relate to those she encountered in the routine of American life. And that is exactly what she and my great-grandfather did.

They learned English to provide a better life for their family. That is what many families in Wisconsin continue to do today and this bill supports that effort.

But there is cause for concern that today's immigrants are not learning English. In fact, data from the 2000 Census found that there are more than 70,000 residents of Wisconsin who speak little or no English, more than double the figure from 1990. Perhaps of greater concern is that 26,000 of those who cannot hold a conversation in English were born here in the United States.

The conclusion is clear. Once we begin providing the linguistic crutch, immigrants – and often, even the children of immigrants – discover that English language learning is "optional." And statistics bear this out. According a 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, 45 percent of Mexican migrants residing in the United States for 6-10 years spoke little or no English. Among those residing for 15 years or more, 45 percent

still did not speak English. In other words, if we do not get immigrants on the road to learning English soon upon arrival, many won't ever begin at all.

For both the immigrants and the state, there is a big reason to get on the road to learning English. From 2000-04, the average full-time worker in Wisconsin who spoke no English at all earned \$15,000 annually. Knowledge of just a little bit of English resulted in an average earnings of 40 percent higher, with further increases noted at each increase in English proficiency. There is no other skill that can so easily raise an immigrant's income and bring the American dream closer to reality.

By establishing English as the official language of Wisconsin, the government will be sending the most critical message of all – that English language learning is the key to a better future. By promoting English over the form-by-form multilingual crutch, Wisconsin government agencies will be giving a new twist to the age old adage – if you give a non-English speaker a translated form, he will get a service today. If you encourage a non-English speaker to learn English, he can get services for a lifetime.

Last, there is one other special feature of this legislation. According to a December 2007 poll by Rasmussen Reports, 79 percent of Wisconsinites support making English the official language. I believe there are few issues that come before the legislature today where four-fifths of the state can agree.

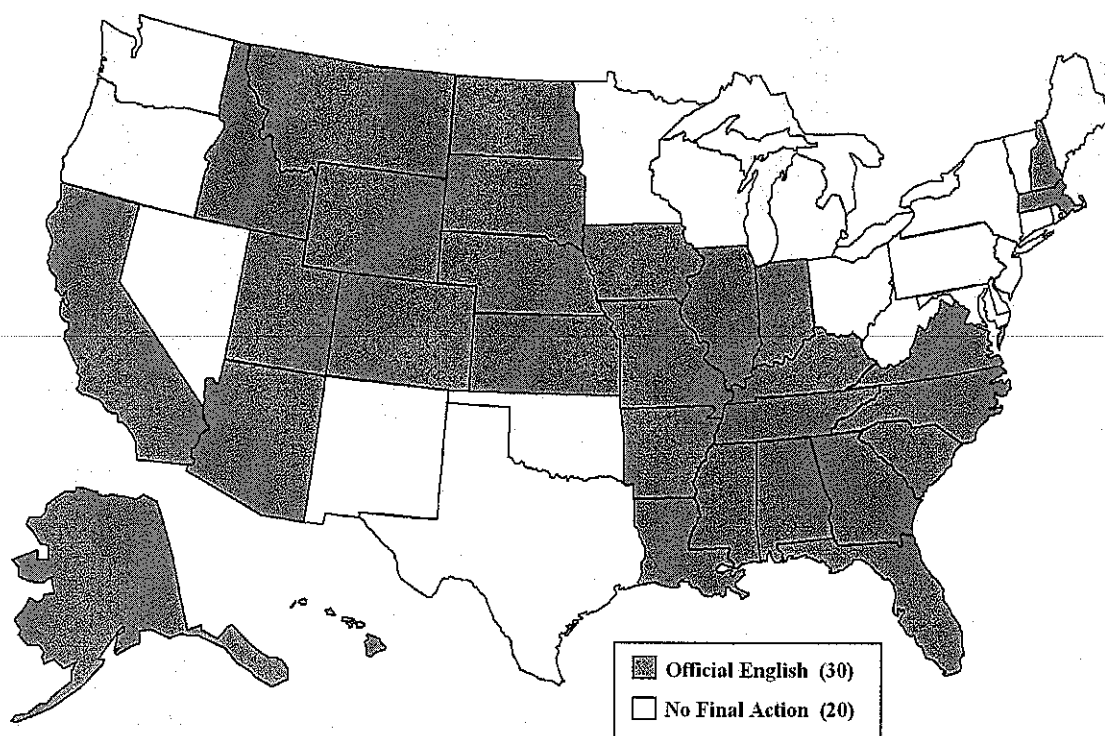
When Wisconsin establishes English as the official language of the state, it will join 30 other states that have already done so. Three - Arizona, Idaho and Kansas - have enacted laws within the last year and a half. None of those states has seen a single lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of such a law.

With English as the official language of Wisconsin, the state has promoted the common, unifying theme among her diverse citizens. One that will move the state, as her motto says, Forward.



Facts & Issues

STATES WITH OFFICIAL ENGLISH LAWS



Alabama (1990)
Alaska (1998)
Arizona (2006)
Arkansas (1987)
California (1986)
Colorado (1988)
Florida (1988)
Georgia (1986 & 1996)
Hawaii (1978)
Idaho (2007)
Illinois (1969)
Indiana (1984)
Iowa (2002)
Kansas (2007)
Kentucky (1984)

Louisiana¹ (1812)
Massachusetts² (1975)
Mississippi (1987)
Missouri (1998)
Montana (1995)
Nebraska (1920)
New Hampshire (1995)
North Carolina (1987)
North Dakota (1987)
South Carolina (1987)
South Dakota (1995)
Tennessee (1984)
Utah (2000)
Virginia (1981 & 1996)
Wyoming (1996)

¹ Required by Congress as a condition for statehood.

² Recognized by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts in *Commonwealth v. Olivo*.

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Public Opinion Surveys

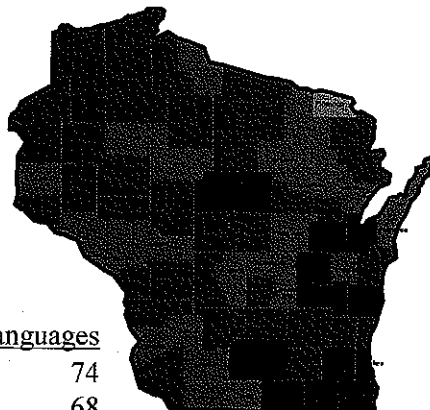
79 percent of Wisconsin likely voters support making English the official language, according to a December 2007 poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports. The poll of 500 Wisconsin likely voters found that vast majorities of members of each political party support the measure. According to the poll, which has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points, only 18 percent oppose the legislation.

79

Percentage of Wisconsin likely voters who support making English the official language.

Number of Languages Spoken, by County

- 51 or more languages
- 21-50 languages
- 11-20 languages
- 6-10 languages
- 4-5 languages
- 1-3 languages



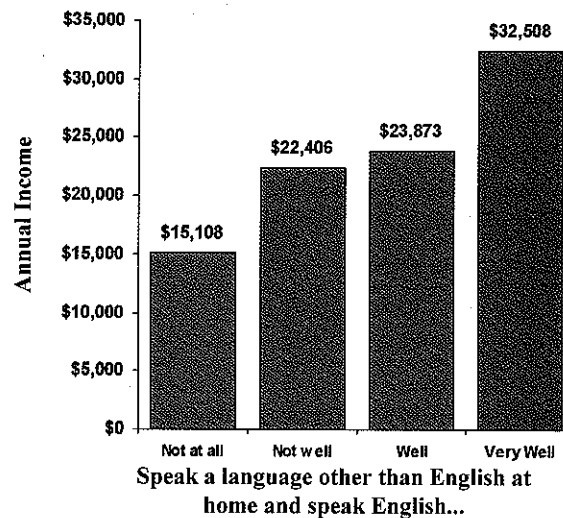
County	Languages
Milwaukee	74
Dane	68
Waukesha	45
Kenosha	34
Racine	31
Brown	30
Rock	29
Winnebago	28
Walworth	26
Marathon	24
Outagamie	24
Sheboygan	22
Fond du Lac	21
Columbia	20

County	Languages
Eau Claire	20
Ozaukee	20
Wood	20
Dodge	19
La Crosse	19
Clark	18
Jefferson	18
Juneau	18
Portage	18
Sauk	18
Washington	18

Language Proficiency and Income

An analysis of the 2000-04 Public Use Microdata Samples from the U.S. Census found a startling difference in annual earnings based on the level of English proficiency. The average full-time Wisconsin worker who spoke no English at all had an annual income of \$15,108 during this span. Knowledge of a little bit of English increased annual earnings by more than 40 percent, to \$21,406. Workers who spoke another language at home, but who spoke English "very well" had an average annual income of nearly double that of those who spoke no English at all.

Average annual income for Wisconsin residents working full-time, by English proficiency level



The average full-time Wisconsin worker who spoke no English at all annually earned:

\$15,108

The average full-time Wisconsin worker who spoke another language at home, but spoke a little English annually earned:

\$22,406

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Limited English Proficiency

According to Census 2000, nearly 150,000 Wisconsin residents over the age of five speak a language other than English at home and speak English "less than very well," meeting the definition of limited

16,069

Number of Wisconsin residents who speak no English at all. This amounts to 3.0 percent of the state's population, up from 2.1 percent in 1990.

More than 70,000 Wisconsinites (3.22 percent) speak English "not well" or "not at all." While 44,000 of these severely limited English proficient residents were born outside the United States, more than 26,000 are Americans by birth.

Immigration and Assimilation

Wisconsin has long been a popular destination for newcomers to the United States. Between 1850 and 1910, each U.S. Census found that more than one-fifth of Wisconsin residents were born outside of the United States.

Recently, new immigrants have rediscovered Wisconsin as an ideal place to begin American life. According to Census 2000, nearly 200,000 Wisconsin residents were born outside the United States, a 50 percent increase since 1970, and accounting for 3.6 percent of the residents of the state. This is the highest proportion since 1960. Wisconsin ranks 25th in the nation in the percentage of immigrants who can speak English "well" or "very well"

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Languages are spoken at home by the residents of Wisconsin. 33 of these languages are spoken by more than 1,000 residents statewide.

Most Common Languages Spoken at Home

Rank	Language	Speakers
1	English	4,653,360
2	Spanish	168,780
3	German	48,300
4	Miao, Hmong	30,570
5	French	14,860
6	Polish	12,095
7	Italian	6,775
8	Chinese	6,560
9	Russian	5,360
10	Arabic	4,090
11	Korean	4,075
12	Norwegian	3,525
13	Laotian	3,315
14	Vietnamese	3,210
15	Japanese	3,185
16	Tagalog	3,145
17	Dutch	3,100
18	Serbian	2,815
19	Greek	2,565
20	Pennsylvania Dutch	2,550

English speaking ability of Wisconsin residents who speak a language other than English at home, 2000

